

Opinion: Bears and trash don't mix well

By Catherine Cecchi

As the days get longer and temperatures rise, our local black bears are becoming more and more active. While some bears that have learned to “supplement” their diet with human food from garbage cans and dumpsters may not have hibernated during this mild winter, many bears are just beginning to wake up from their wintertime slumber and they are hungry. Bears are typically very active in their search for food in the springtime, and at Clean Tahoe we've seen a dramatic increase in animal-in-trash incidents in recent weeks.

This is a terrible situation for the bears as well as for all of the neighbors in an area where a bear has been feasting on human food waste. A bear that has frequent access to human food will likely lose its natural fear of humans and also may damage property in its quest to reach the food source, oftentimes resulting in a death sentence for the animal – “a fed bear is a dead bear.”

Here are a few tips for ensuring bears don't get into your garbage:

- Put all food waste in bear-resistant twist-lid cans (available at Scotty's Hardware at the Y) or metal bear bins. If you have regular trashcans, keep food waste inside your house (not your garage) until the morning of trash pick up. South Tahoe Refuse recently pushed back residential trash pick up time by two hours, so you don't have to put trash out the night before.
- If you own a vacation rental or second home, consider installing a metal bear bin. It's worth the investment. Find options online.

- Keep dumpsters locked at all times. “Locking” a dumpster can be as simple as sliding a carabineer clip into the hole securing the lock bar in place.
- If you see a trash problem in your neighborhood, please report it to the Clean Tahoe Program at 530.544.4210. There are ordinances in the city and the county prohibiting animal access to garbage. We will post a warning notice at the property, and recommend a citation for repeat offenders.

We should all do our part to keep our community clean and protect local wildlife.

Catherine Cecchi is executive director of the Clean Tahoe Program.